

# **Helsinki City Tourist Information in the near future**

## **- The expectations of the stakeholders**

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Master's thesis  
Degree program in Tourism  
2012



Degree programme in Tourism

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<b>Title of report</b> Helsinki City Tourist Information in the near future - The expectations of the stakeholders	<b>Number of pages and appendices</b> 74 + 3
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<p>The aim of this thesis is to study what expectations the stakeholders of Helsinki City Tourist Information have for the roles and services of the office within the following 2-4 years. The purpose is also to find out how the services of Tourist Information need to be developed to better meet the changes in people's travel patterns and the technology development in the future.</p> <p>The theoretical framework of this thesis presents the phenomena and trends affecting the travel patterns of tourists and the demand and use of tourist information service online and physically in the travel destinations. It also examines the changes in the roles of Destination Management Organizations and their tourist information centers.</p> <p>The empirical part of the thesis consist of 8 interviews with 9 representatives of Tourist Information stakeholders. The data analysis was influenced by the grounded theory method but the data collections based on the theoretical framework.</p> <p>The results of the study show that there is no need for radical changes in the roles and tasks of Tourist Information. In the near future the tourist information services need to be available where tourists move and the information must be objective but tailored to the needs of the individual visitors. Various tourism products should be supplied in the premises of Tourist Information and the office is expected to share its expertise and knowledge on actual tourism matters in Helsinki for its stakeholders too.</p>	
<b>Keywords</b> Stakeholder, Helsinki, tourist information, service design, tourism, development	

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# 1 Introduction

World is changing faster than ever and changes bring challenges to businesses and entrepreneurs. Tourism and travel industry has faced many changes during the last 40 - 50 years. For the actors in travel business it is important to prepare for the future challenges by studying the possible changes in the operational environment and travel patterns and the influence of technological development in the whole industry. By identifying the changes it is easier to keep up with the competition.

Recent years have indicated that the demand for traditional tourist information services is decreased and modern services and information channels are appraised more and more. Online booking and shopping services are commonly available and the use of technology in any stage of travelling, from planning the trip to sharing one's experiences with friends and relatives after the trip, is ordinary. Especially the development of advanced communication tools like social media and mobile applications make people adopt travel information anywhere, any time. This change challenges the role of traditional tourist information centres as the offices only serve during fixed opening hours whereas the potential visitors want and can use the online services when most convenient for them. If tourist information organizations want to remain their position as the service-oriented, reliable and convenient service provider they need to adapt new roles.

The focus of this thesis is to investigate what are the expectations of stakeholders of the Helsinki City Tourist Information services for the upcoming nearest 2-4 years. It is a commission of Helsinki City Tourist & Convention Bureau. The study responds especially to the demand of the Tourist Information and its' stakeholder aiming to develop the tourist information services. The sales services of the Information Office are currently developed and with the help of this study it is possible to evaluate if the implemented changes have been advantageous so far and what should be the next steps on the path of development. The findings of the study can also help to specify the skills that are required from the staff of tourist information in the future. Personnel

training and recruiting is easier to plan with a clear strategy or action plan for coming years.

Even though the focus of this research is on Helsinki City Tourist Information its results can be utilized by the whole tourist information sector especially in Finland but also universally. Helsinki City Tourist Information has broad networks in Finland and Europe thanks to its membership and active role in the Association of Tourism Organizations in Finland, Suoma ry, and the European Cities Marketing, ECM. The findings of this thesis can be reported widely for the partners in both networks.

Tourism and its secondary industries are significant employers in Helsinki region. Nearly half of the tourism industry's income in Finland is generated in the Helsinki region. In 2011 Helsinki accommodated approximately 3,4 million overnight guests, of whom about 56% were foreign nationals. Compared to the year 2010 the growth of 5.5. % in overnight stays reached the a record in 2011. Room occupancy rate in Helsinki in 2011 was 69,5%. About 54 % of visitors were in Helsinki on leisure and the rest on business. The numbers of visitors arriving via Helsinki International Airport and Helsinki harbors also reached their new records in 2011. (Helsinki City Tourist & Convention Bureau 2012a.)

The number of domestic visitors in Helsinki has been increasing ever since the summer 2007 and is still growing. Over the past years Helsinki has received most of its foreign visitors from Russia, Germany, Great Britain, Sweden, USA and Japan, the order changing year by year. Also Italian, French and Spanish visitors and tourists from China, India, and Estonia play an important role in tourism business in Helsinki. (Helsinki City Tourist & Convention Bureau 2012a.)

## **1.1 Aim and limitation**

Helsinki City Tourist & Convention Bureau is a part of the Economic Development division in Helsinki City Economic and Planning Centre. During the autumn 2012 the Economic Development Division including the Tourist & Convention Bureau is undergoing a reorganization that will have some effects on the operational environment

of the office. However, this study is executed based on the former organization of Tourist & Convention Bureau and duties of its Tourist Information. The data of the research is collected by 8 interviews during September 2012 when the stakeholders of the Tourist Information did not know about the possible changes in the organization and its roles.

The aim of this thesis is to study what expectations the stakeholders have for Tourist Information and its services within the following 2-4 years in Helsinki. More closely it studies how the stakeholders in different service sectors see the roles of Tourist Information in the future. The purpose is also to find out how the services of Tourist Information need to be developed to better meet the changes in people's travel patterns and the technology development.

Helsinki City Tourist & Convention Bureau maintain the Tourist Information Offices in the city centre of Helsinki on Pohjoisesplanadi street and at the central Railway station as well as the regional Tourist Information at Helsinki Airport. In addition it runs the Helsinki Helper project that during summer season brings Tourist Information Officers to patrol in the streets of the city centre of Helsinki. The three Information Offices have partly different operational environments and daily duties as well as stakeholders. In this study the interviewees represented the stakeholders of the office on Pohjoisesplanadi which is the main Tourist Information Office with the most versatile role and services.

In this research the studied stakeholders of Tourist Information are limited to those who have a business interest on the Tourist Information and its services. The end-users of the service, tourists, are left outside of the research because of the existing possibility to study their opinions by the customer feedback formula that is collected in Helsinki City Tourist Information regularly. During the previous years the average satisfaction percentage of the survey has been well over 4 in scale from 1 to 5.

This study takes a closer look on the changing demands of tourists from the viewpoint of social influence on decision making and the influence of the new technology and

social media. It also examines how to respond to the demand of better service with service design. Moreover, the study analyses the changes in the roles of Destination Management Organizations and their tourist information centers. All these phenomena and trends affect on the travel patterns of tourists and hence the demand and use of tourist information service online and physically in the travel destination.

## **1.2 Structure of the thesis**

The tourism industry has become more aware of people's needs for customized and tailored services. Tourists want to be individual travelers and choose the services that best meet their need. The trends and changing demands of tourist are studied in this thesis along with the phenomena that will cause changes in tourism information services in the near future.

The development of the advanced communication tools and online booking services make people adopt information on traveling anywhere. The study shortly introduces some of the advantages and challenges that new technologies and virtual services bring to the tourism information services in the near future.

The service design theory can be seen as the key to improve tourist information services and understanding the needs of stakeholders of Tourist Information. After a short introduction of the service experience theory the study focuses on the concept of service design followed by the chapter that introduces the implications of service design in Destination Management Organizations. The future roles of the Destination Management Organizations and their tourist information centers will be discussed before taking a closer look to Helsinki City Tourist & Convention Bureau's operations.

The empirical part of the thesis consist of 8 interviews with 9 representatives of Tourist Information stakeholders. The data analysis was influenced by the grounded theory method even though the data collections based on the theoretical framework. Results of the study are divided into subchapters of which each describes the duties of Tourist Information that interviewees considered important in the future. The conclusions summarize the ideas that can help the office to improve its services and



present some suggestions for Tourist Information operations in the future. The principal results of the study are also shown in the table that is enclosed as an attachment at the end of this thesis (attachment 3).

## **2 Trends in Tourism**

Collins (2001, 268) argue that the most successful businesses keep on their core values and goals but adapt to the changes of business environment by modifying their strategies and procedures. It is crucial for the actors in tourism industry to examine the current trends of tourism and the changing demands of their customers. This chapter presents some of the trends and phenomena which affects the tourist information services around the world now and in the near future. It also provides tools that help the actors in tourism industry to respond to the needs of their clients.

### **2.1 Changing demands of tourists**

The development of tourism products and services should based on customers' needs and the changes in the needs. Due to the immigration and globalization, for example, the tourist profile in and from one specific area can differ greatly. The needs are subjected to the changes in the environment and lifestyle of human. The actors in tourism industry must filter the right signals indicating the changes in order to keep up with the needs of customers. (Leveälahti 2001, 118-120.)

In recent years tourism industry has become more aware of people's needs for customized and tailored services. Tourists do not want to be part of the mass but individual travelers who choose the services most convenient and interesting for themselves. The tourism industry is as depended to the trend analysis, megatrends and weak signals, as any other business. Phenomena in tourism are highly comparative to the prevailing general opinions and trends or travelers' personal values. (MEK 2006a.) When the needs of visitors have been identified, co-operation between actors in the field, in public and private sectors, is needed. Innovative new products attract tourists to the destinations; typically an actor in private sector innovates and produces a service or product and the public sectors helps to further develop, market and study it. Service design is one of the most important tools for the product development and helps to connect different actors in the field. (Leveälahti 2001, 118-120.)

Already in the beginning of 21st century the Finnish Tourist Board MEK published a scenario report that aims to provide tools for tourism industry to develop and keep up with the pace of the future. The scenario report was first published in 2004 and updated and widened in 2006. It foresees the changes and trends until the year 2020. (MEK 2006b.)

### **2.1.1 Social influence on decision making**

Many researches prove that personal sources of information, including previous experience and word of mouth recommendations from friends and acquaintances, are considered the most reliable way to find out whether a destination is ideal for that specific person and will not set off unpleasant surprises (Laws 2004, 101).

Also Huan and Beaman (2004, 151) stress that one single event, e.g. talking with a friend, can direct a decision toward particular outcome that have not even been an option before the contact. Therefore the power of social influences on decision making should not be underestimated.

### **2.1.2 Internet, social media and virtual marketing tools**

The information society has introduced many changes in technology that affect significantly the ways people search information, book and buy services and communicate with their travel associates. Interaction and two-way communication are easy with smartphones and tablets that people carry around in their pockets and bags. Also tourism industry, hotels, restaurants and tourist attractions need to keep up with the changes in technology and communication tools. (Leveälahti 2001, 115.)

Web 2.0 has introduced applications that seamlessly connect with the services that people use similarly. Google Map is a good example of these support applications; the visitor attractions have linked Google Map on their own website and tagged their service on Google Map of their city. In the near future Web 3.0 is taking the Internet one step further. Called the semantic web, the 3.0. is predicted to connect data automatical-

ly by simple commands by human. Web 3.0 can be identified as a virtual personal assistant. (Markoff 2006.)

Online communities that facilitate the sharing of user-generated content (UGC) have experienced phenomenal growth in recent years. Social networks, blogs and social media are channels where users share information and texts, photos, videos and music to entertain and communicate with each others. Social networks are also platforms for users to express their opinions and experiences of products and services. Networks provide new marketing channels but also raise major issues for destinations and tourist services as organizations cannot manage all the information available about their services (Murphy, Centeno Gill & Schegg 2010, 467-468.) Online travel communities such as TripAdvisor enable users to share their experiences of travel destinations, accommodation and restaurant services. TripAdvisor has already millions of reviews by travelers and it is considered the most accurate and reliable source of UGC network within travelers around the world. (Tripadvisor 2012.)

Facebook has become one of the most influential social medium as it is the most visited social media website in the world. According to the paper by Stankov, Lazic & Dragicevic (2010) several studies show that social media might change the entire marketing practices of tourism destinations yet their potential is not yet widely recognized by national tourism organizations (NTO). About a half of the European NTO's had official present on Facebook in 2010. Every NTO should consider the marketing strategies in social media in following years and be more active in the utilization of different UGC applications and promotional tools of Facebook and other networks. (Stankov et al. 2010.)

Tourists are interested in information that enables them to experience the destination as a whole and does not just give facts for traveling. With the help of virtual reality user can develop consideration and awareness in their potential destination choice. Especially three-dimension (3D) environments will gain more attention in following years and provide new tools for destination marketing. People who visit virtual destinations may become interested in visiting the destinations in person and virtual marketing can

lead to the utilizations of real-world products. (Huang, Backman & Backman 2010, 555-557.)

### **2.1.3 Mobile applications**

Mobile applications are already widely available in tourist services in forms of city, event, sport and museum guides. According to Bortenschlager, Häusler, Schweiger, Egger and Jooss (2010, 149-150) several studies indicate that mobile services have a big potential in tourism since there are over four billion mobile users in the world: over 90 % of potential tourists say they could use a mobile device to search tourist information and almost 85 % would feel comfortable buying tickets and getting restaurant and attraction recommendations by mobile device.

Mobile tagging by QR codes is already a common sight in urban life. Mobile phone user gets information about the specific service by reading the two-dimension code with his or her mobile phone. In tourism, QR codes can provide additional information e.g. about museum services: by reading the QR code the user opens a brochure, information board or online service to his mobile screen. At a bus stop a mobile user can check the timetables or changes in traffic. Service providers can use QR codes to enrich the product information, support the advertisement activities and sell online. (Canadi, Höpken & Fuchs 2010, 137-140.)

Nokia Maps, available in Nokia cell phone Symbian operating system, is a map application that combines a route planner and search engine covering information about shops and attractions. By pointing the mobile camera towards a specific building or place, the user gets information about the spot with the Nokia Live View feature. A person who carries a mobile phone with Android and iOS operating system can utilize the mobile e.g. in Amsterdam or Museum of Modern Art MoMa in New York. (Kiippa 2012, 25.) I Amsterdam Mobile City Guide can be used online and offline with the help of GPS-plotting to get tourist information (I Amsterdam 2009; Kiippa 2012, 25). MoMa's mobile application presents the museum collections and pieces of arts and also includes audio guides for museum visit. Museum tours can be done live or virtually. In addition, the user can e.g. search for the specific piece from the collection and

find more information about it in the museum data base or listen to his favorite music while touring virtual or live in the museum. (Kiippa 2012, 25; The Museum of Modern Art 2012.)

## **2.2 Demand on better services**

Some organizations declare services to be part of their business whereas some define themselves as a service company providing only intangible services (Baron & Harris 2003, 18-19). According to Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler (2009, 4) services are "deeds, processes, and performances provided or coproduced by one entity or person for another entity or person".

Tangible goods often include services as a co-product although the pure services are usually intangible. For example, a bus journey is a combination of intangible service and tangible product: to be able to move from place to place there is a need for bus but without bus driver driving the bus, delivering the service, customer does not have use for the bus itself. (Zeithaml et al. 2009, 6.)

In tourism, products are often services rather than tangible goods and are usually high on experience factors. That means client must experience the service offered to him before he can judge whether the service is good or bad. (Baron & Harris 2003, 19-20.)

### **2.2.1 Service experience in tourism**

Service experiences are social situations and can be significantly influenced by the interactions between staff and customers. Service delivery entails interaction with the customer, and its quality depend on the way the individual employees interpret service design and performance criteria and how the customer cooperates in the situation. The service quality is produced in the interaction between the customer and the customer servant. (Laws 2004, 131.)

A service product of tourism industry combines various services and a service package can be a bundle by several service providers. Therefore, the quality of tourism product

relies on a complex structure of regional service providers and each product affects on the holistic image of the tourism destination and tourist's expectations towards the destination. (Stickdorn 2009, 248-249.) To achieve concrete positive results, the service providers need to co-operate with each others. Different actors need to create collaborative networks to obtain a common vision in service quality; collaborative services ask for direct and active involvement by all the interested actors. (Manzini 2009, 48-50.)

Stickdorn states (2009, 246):

Tourism is a service-intensive industry depending on the customer's service experience and their consequent assessments of its quality. -- Constantly evolving information and communication technology, changing behaviour patterns among tourists, and the continuing development of holistic tourism products and packages enhance the information availability of tourism products.

The way the employees in tourism industry and secondary field, e.g. in shops, banks and entertainment and leisure centers, serve tourists in different situations can make a difference. Information providers can have very strong influence on what tourists think e.g. about a certain attractions or services in destination. Also the individual characteristics, community features and factors covering relationships between residents and community, locals and tourists can impact positively or negatively to tourism. (Thyne & Zins 2004, 33.) Therefore, tourist authorities should educate and share their expertise with people who work among tourists.

Baum (2002, 106-107) and the references therein stress that the customer care should involve everyone in the organization. The idea can be enlarged to include everyone who meets tourists. People who meet customers face-to-face are in key position when it comes to the service experience and decision making.

### **2.2.2 Designing services**

Service design is a method of reducing variability in the services; the heterogeneity of the services is narrowed down by standardizing parts that are invisible for clients. De-

signing services is sometimes synonym for planning. Service design can be both designing processes and physical environment. Design of the process can be said to be planning of operation efficiency whereas physical environment design concentrates on marketing effectiveness. (Baron & Harris 2003, 21, 94-95.)

Miettinen (2009, 14) suggests that the several thresholds should be considered when developing and applying a service design processes. Those steps are following:

1. Need to understand the service design challenges that the users, business environment and applicable technologies bring
2. Observation, profiling, creation of empathy for users, participation with the users and being visual during the whole process
3. Creation of ideas, prototyping, evaluation and improvation of the product with clients and end-users
4. Implementation, maintenance and development of services
5. Act according to business realities

Product and development cycle can be described in a simple figure (figure 1).

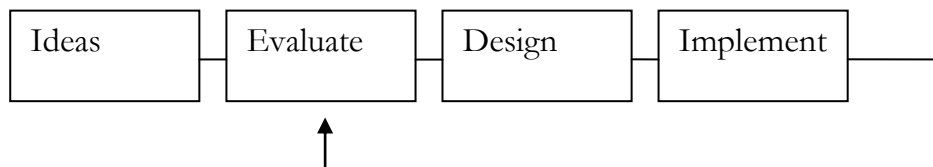


Figure 1. Product and service development cycle (Mc-Lean-Conner 2006, 84)

Development of service starts by generating ideas and understanding the service context. A good way to collect ideas is by listening to the customers and employees. Ideas can be collected e.g. by surveys and feedback forms, interviews and observation. (McLean-Conner 2006, 84; Miettinen 2009, 13.)

After collecting the ideas they need to be evaluated. Product and service offerings should support the strategic goals of the company. Customer service oriented businesses should choose products and services that enhance the customers'



experiences. The evaluation in this point needs to cover the marketing analysis, financial assesment and success measures. (McLean-Conner 2006, 83, 86-87.)

Decision about the offering, whether it is a service or a product, should base on the businesses strategic focus, customer base and regulatory environment. The service design phase includes decisions over marketing, sales and communication strategies. The service is priced and the training on the selling is done during the design process, too. (McLean-Conner 2006, 83, 88-90.)

When the service is designed, it is time to put it into the market. In the implementation stage the finalization of the contracts is done with the business associates and the product penetrates the market. After the product launch, user feedback needs to be collected in order to evaluate the product and its development. (McLean-Conner 2006, 91-93.) Next chapter will discuss what kind of implications there are for service design in Destination Management Organizations.

### **3 The changing role of DMOs and their Visitor Centers**

Laws (2004, 32) defines tourism with the following description:

Tourism is an industry which is concerned with transporting people on a temporary basis away from their homes to other places where they stay for a while and indulge in a range of pursuits before returning home.

In this chapter a look on the changing roles of Destination Management Organizations and their visitor centers is taken.

#### **3.1 Tourism industry and its actors**

The tourism destination is a physical space where tourists travel to spend their leisure time (WTO 2007, 1). A holiday or a journey consists of destination elements in the form of natural or primary destination attractions, such as the area's climate, its scenery or an important attraction, supported by the secondary features such as hotels, guest houses and the range of attractions, shopping and catering. Transport, tour operating and travel retailing subsystems provide an entire range of services required for a holiday. Tourists experience varying styles and qualities of services during their holiday in the destination as they are served by transportation companies, hotels, restaurants and a variety of other tourist attractions in the destination. (Laws 2004, 22-24.)

Destination Management Organizations can operate nationally, regionally, provincially or locally. Destination Management Organization, DMO, is the coordinator of destination marketing and the strategic leader of destination development. DMOs' role is also to bring together resources and expertise to the use of tourism enterprises in the region it operates. (WTO 2007, 2-3.) A recent Swedish study by Bodén (2009, 23) indicates that Destination Management Organizations have a very important role in developing and strengthening tourism industry's competitiveness even today. The study suggests that one of the challenges for DMOs is to be the integrating body of qualified tourism product providers and the demand of tourists.

### **3.2 Current role of Destination Management Organizations in Finland**

Regional, provincial and local DMOs are responsible for managing and marketing tourism on a certain geographic region, county or town (WTO 2007, 2-3). In Finland there are both public DMOs and regional DMOs that are funded in collaboration with public and private sectors. The Finnish Tourism Board MEK, or Visit Finland that is its marketing name outside of Finland, acts on the role of National Tourism Organization. It is responsible for tourism management and marketing at the national level. (MEK 2012.)

The local DMO should put the tourism strategies into action and monitor the outcomes. Its tasks are also to monitor the interests of the industry in economy and development, enhance the co-operation between the actors in the field and maintain information channels, image marketing and PR activities as well as provide education for the actors. (Santala, Vesterinen & Moilanen 2004, 51-52.)

According to Laukkanen's study (2010, 33-34), most of the regional or local DMOs in Finland are corporations that sell tourist and marketing services for municipalities and private entrepreneurs. Finne (2010, 42) studied tourism organizations in the Southern-Finland and found out that most DMOs in the area have tourist services and marketing covered partly by public and partly by private finances. The most important tasks are marketing of the destination together with tourism industry and maintaining the tourist information services. DMOs also provide important distribution channels for tourism products. Due to the limited financial resources most Finnish DMOs have to concentrate on chargeable activities and they cannot act actively in destination development role. (Laukkanen 2010, 33-34.) In Southern-Finland, however, most DMOs have enough resources and an active role in the destination development via strategy work participation (Finne 2010, 42).

### **3.3 Challenges of DMOs in the future**

As discussed earlier, social influence is high when people choose their travel destination. People imagine the places where they want to visit through their "mind's eye"

with the image they build based on the conversations with others or through media and social media. Howie states that "purposeful marketing is the most powerful persuasive tool" in making the potential customers to become actual tourists in that specific destination. (Howie 2003, 327.) Promotion and marketing are essential tools for attracting tourists as they provide information about destinations characteristics and influence the decision making process (Hui 2010).

As Internet has become the most important and cost-efficient marketing tool, potential tourists found ways to deal directly with the regional tourist offices and the role of national tourism organizations as an intermediary decreased and many offices were shut down (Howie 2003, 327). In the beginning of 21st century the Finnish Tourist Board MEK still had several offices in foreign countries. Since then MEK has cut down services provided to individual tourists by developing internet marketing and social media campaigns. (MEK 2012.)

Shutting down the Tourist Information Centers and cutting the marketing budgets of DMOs is a current trend around the world. Local governing bodies of tourism need to find new modes of financing their businesses in co-operation with public and private sectors and by cutting the operational costs. (Simpson 2006.) As the financial support from public sector decrease destinations should focus on innovate and flexible management and be receptive to the needs of the market. Especially the know-how and knowledge of the personnel in DMOs will play an important role when responding to the future challenges. (Fyall 2012.)

### **3.3.1 Importance of PR**

Wang (2011, 15-17) emphasizes the importance of PR in the future role of DMOs. As potential tourists become more independent on searching information on destination and the word-of-mouth (WOM) the most important pull-factor, the traditional role of DMOs will decrease. That is why DMOs need to find influential referees to act as their messengers and powerful spokespersons as their CEOs.

Drawing attention to high-profile community events, industry meetings and newsworthy events help DMOs to put the destination in the front of the news media. DMOs' role as the official face and voice of the destination will be one of the most powerful tools and effective channels to attract visitors in the future. PR should be targeted to opinion-leaders such as awarded journalists and travel writers in widespread newspapers, magazines and guide books, celebrities, political leaders and other mavens. Furthermore, the importance of bloggers cannot be underestimated nowadays. Inviting opinion leaders and high-profile mavens to the destination and giving them VIP treatment help DMOs to reach successful channels of WOM. (Wang 2011, 15.)

In addition, DMOs need to build cooperative and supportive relationships with the travel agencies, tour operators and other intermediates who do business in their destination. DMOs need to be their preferred source of information and help them to sell the destination for their clients. A high-profile CEO in Destination Management Organization creates effective communication in and for destination and between the DMO and the key stakeholders. (Wang 2011, 15.)

### **3.3.2 Following and setting trends**

In the future DMOs need to be more aware of the ever-changing trends and mega-trends that have an influence in tourism. With the help of studies and research DMOs can predict the changes in travel patterns and implement new performances easier and more efficiently. DMOs need to be the messengers sharing their knowledge and know-how to the stakeholders whose business rely on tourism and for the community officials who are responsible for development and infrastructure of the destination. (Wang 2011, 16-17.)

In the world where word-of-mouth is the king, DMOs need to define not only its own service standards but of any other service providers associated with the destination. That includes monitoring and reporting performances of the service providers and visitor experiences. Furthermore, DMOs need to be the leaders and spokespersons of sustainable development in the destination. (Wang 2011, 16-17.)

Cole (2008) believes that the strategic Tourist Information Centres, in other words the destination's main tourist information, will have a great impact on the regional and national visitor economies and their role in supporting local travel economy is crucial. Tourist Informations need to find new ways for co-operation in order to attract visitors in the future when the information and booking services are not the prior reasons for visitor to pop in the office. Partnerships with actors on secondary or tertiary fields of tourism, like libraries, coffee shops or museums, might provide new services that tourists in the future value. (Davies 2011.)

### **3.4 Tourist Information centers and their stakeholders**

The visitor or Tourist Information Centers (TICs), commonly known as Tourist Informations, provide information for tourists in several stages of their journey. The first stage is to provide information prior to the visit through different channels, such as by phone, e-mail, internet and social media. In the destination there are the physical Information Offices where tourists can enter during their visit to get accurate information about services and to meet local, friendly staff willing to share their expertise and knowledge. In addition, the official Tourist Informations often give training for people who work in positions where they meet tourists in customer service on regular basis like hotel receptions, restaurant and attraction staff, taxi drivers and commercial centre information desks. TICs also bring information to places where tourists cluster; Rather than drawing tourists to the build Information Centers the information is taken to the streets by 'meeters and greeters', like Helpers in Helsinki, and other popular tourist attractions in the form of signs, notice boards, leaflet racks, hotel receptions, attraction cashiers and electronic information kiosks. The information on the streets is not always supervised by official tourist organizations, though. (WTO 2007, 120-121.)

In many destinations the Tourist Information also transact commercial activities. It is often possible to book accommodation as well as buy tickets to tours and transport, guide books, maps and souvenirs in the Information Office. Very advanced and large Tourist Centers also provide ancillary services like bike and equipment rental and luggage storage on their premises. Nowadays, there is also high demand for public internet access at the TICs. (WTO 2007, 121.)

Tourist Informations aim to encourage visitors' expenditure in the local businesses and lengthen their stay in the destination. Tourist Informations steer tourists to use local enterprises and services in terms of maximizing the benefits of the destination's economy. TICs also provide a platform for local entrepreneurs and other tourism stakeholders to advertise and sell their products in their premises. (WTO 2007, 121.)

### **3.5 Tourist Information Centers in the future**

Today's skeptical consumers have a need for detailed, relevant and tailored information (O'Connor, Wang & Li 2011, 227). As travelers in the future will more often be in contact directly with the service providers, the role of personnel in Tourist Information Centers will be more of a counselor. Some visitors need Information Officers to assist them in finding suitable options and help in decision-making process, when the others still want to meet a friendly local and feel the personal touch instead of virtual counselor. The personnel needs to know the travel services in the destination inside out in order to help tourists to locate and tailor services that fit best to them. The personnel in Tourist Information Centers can be seen as ambassadors of the destination. (Buchalis, Leung & Law 2011, 208-209; Davies 2011.)

## **4 Helsinki City Tourist & Convention Bureau and its Tourist Informations**

Helsinki City Tourist & Convention Bureau is one of the four offices of Economic Development division in Helsinki City Economic and Planning Centre. As a city organization it gets the directions for its operations from the City Council, which is elected in municipal elections every four years (City of Helsinki 2012). Tourist & Convention Bureau markets Helsinki as a tourist and congress destination. Together with its supporting corporation Helsingin Matkailu Ltd the office employs about 35 people permanently. During the summer the amount of personnel grows to about 75 people as Helsinki Helpers and summer Information Officers step on duty. (Helsinki City Tourist & Convention Bureau 2012b.)

The vision of Tourist & Convention Bureau is to make Helsinki one of the most competitive city destinations in the global tourism market with a strong and unique brand image. The bureau aims to make Helsinki a year-round, attractive travel destination for leisure travelers and the leading congress city in the Nordic region with highest-quality congress services in Europe. In addition, Helsinki wants to be an essential cruise destination in the Baltic Sea region, which now is the world's third important cruise destination after Caribbean and Mediterranean. (Helsinki City Tourist & Convention Bureau 2012c.)

Tourist & Convention Bureau markets Helsinki as a travel destination in co-operation with companies and organizations in the travel trade in Finland and abroad. Marketing operations are targeted to 10 countries. Abroad the destination marketing is done together with the cities of Espoo, Kauniainen and Vantaa. In co-operation with both public and private sectors the bureau strengthens the appeal of Helsinki to tourists and promotes the development of the travel trade. This includes monitoring the development through statistics and research. The office also provides visitors and residents in the region with practical information about the city and its attractions, events and travel services in its Tourist Information Offices. (Helsinki City Tourist & Convention Bureau 2012c.)



#### **4.1 Strategy of Helsinki City**

At the beginning of 2009 Helsinki City Council set the strategy for the city for the years 2009-2012. The strategy clearly points out the tasks for tourism and tourism related industries. The aim is to make Helsinki a well-known international travel destination. The results are evaluated e.g. by measuring the numbers of work and leisure visitors and the workplaces in tourism enterprises and conference organizations in the region. (Helsingin kaupungin matkailu- ja kongressitoimisto 2009, 39.) During 2012 the new strategy for the years 2013-2016 will be set.

In 2009 the City Council presented the following tools for implementation of the strategy (Helsingin kaupungin matkailu- ja kongressitoimisto 2009, 39):

- The image of Helsinki as an internationally recognized destination for tourism, congresses and events is strengthened
- Tourism and its secondary trades are developed in co-operation with public and private sectors
- Information about travel products and customers' needs is collected
- Maritime services for visitors are developed and the image of Helsinki as an international cruise destination is strengthened
- Helsinki Design - concept is strengthened
- A concept of Finnish food and fine dining culture in Helsinki is developed

#### **4.2 Strategy of Tourism & Convention Bureau**

Helsinki does not have its own, separate tourism strategy. Tasks and goals for Helsinki City Tourist & Convention Bureau are set in the strategy of Economic Development. Seven goals and tasks are highlighted in the action plan and are following (Helsinki City Tourist & Convention Bureau 2012c):

- Helsinki region is the most important year-round tourism destination in Finland and one of the most attractive city break destinations in European travel market

- Tourism services and the industry is developed responsibly together with public and private operators
- Helsinki is the marketing name for the whole region including the capital and cities of Espoo, Vantaa and Kauniainen. The region is marketed as a travel destination together with public and private actors
- Helsinki has a strong brand image
- Helsinki is internationally known for its events
- Helsinki is easy to reach
- Tourism services are on high quality, easy to reach and meet the customers' needs

### **4.3 Helsingin Matkailu Ltd**

Helsingin Matkailu Ltd is a city owned handling company that was founded to ease the co-operation between public and private sector in the industry. Through the handling company, Tourist & Convention Bureau can seek private enterprises to finance and participate in the chargeable marketing activities and campaigns run by the Tourist & Convention Bureau. (Helsingin Matkailu Oy 2012.)

About half of the employees of the Tourist & Convention Bureau are hired via Helsingin Matkailu but in the daily work an outsider cannot tell the difference between the activities of Helsinki City and Helsingin Matkailu. All the activities and decision-making of the company are bound to the City operations. (Helsingin Matkailu Oy 2012.)

Helsingin Matkailu Ltd is run by the board and the daily operations are managed by the part-time managing director. The board and managing director are instructed and supervised by the board of Tourist & Convention Bureau. Company does not aspire for profit but aims to cover the operational costs by the income from the marketing activities with the private sector. (Helsingin Matkailu Oy 2012.)

#### 4.4 Tourist Information in the city centre

Helsinki City Tourist & Convention Bureau runs two Information Offices. The main office is located at the street Pohjoisesplanadi, just next to the Market Square. The main office is open every day throughout the year, exceptions being Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. The main offices serve about 300 000 customers yearly, of which about 283 000 are visiting the premises and the rest are served by phone, e-mail and other indirect ways of communication. In the premises of Tourist Information there is also a sales counter occupied by the travel agent Helsinki Expert and pop-up sales desks for external companies. (Helsinki City Tourist & Convention Bureau 2012d.)

Tourist information is also available at Helsinki Railway station within the premises of Helsinki Expert sales office. During summer the service point is open daily and in the winter season six days a week. Service point fully concentrates on providing face-to-face information for visitors while Helsinki Expert books accommodation and supplies travel services. About 41 000 tourists get information and advice yearly. (Helsinki City Tourist & Convention Bureau 2012d.)

During summer tourist information is also available on the streets of Helsinki. Helsinki Helpers patrol the streets, harbors and ferry terminals, Railway station and shuttle bus stops giving information and tourist material for visitors. During the summer 2012 Helpers served altogether 129 400 tourists, 85 % of them being foreign nationals. (Heikinheimo & Leskelä 2012, 4, 6-7.) Helpers also serve tourists in the mobile Info Container (figure 2) which is a modern steel and wooden design container for information and promotion performances that can be moved to the selected locations in the city (Helsinki City Tourist & Convention Bureau 2012e).



Figure 2. Mobile Info Container

During the last 3 seasons it has served in so-called Flower Market by the statue of Havis Amanda, on the small square next to the Market Square and opposite the main Tourist Information. (Helsinki City Tourist & Convention Bureau 2012e.)

The following map (figure 3) indicates the locations of the main Tourist Information, Railway Station and Flower Market with the Info Container.



Figure 3. Tourist Information stalls in the map

Hernesaari, located about 3 kilometers from the city centre, accommodates the biggest international cruise ships that dock in Helsinki during the cruise season. Tourist Information disembarks to the Hernesaari cruise pier too. In 2011 Tourist & Convention Bureau opened a new information kiosk and selling point for handing out brochures and other material and selling travel tickets to cruise passengers in the near vicinity of the piers. Currently Hernesaari is undergoing a large development project that aims to improve the cruise passenger services within the pier area. Also the info kiosk services will be improved during the following years. (Helsinki City Tourist & Convention Bureau 2012f.)

#### **4.4.1 Services of Helsinki City Tourist Information main office**

The main service of Helsinki City Tourist Information is to inform visitors' about the city and its attractions, events and travel services. Besides the face-to-face contact at the premises of Visitor Centre, customer service is given by e-mail and phone, and nowadays seldom by letter and telefax. Tourist Information also posts brochures and maps of Helsinki free of charge around the world. (Helsinki City Tourist & Convention Bureau 2012d.)

Tourist Information personnel runs its own Facebook-site, writes posts to Bureau's blog and updates the official tourism website together with the Communication Unit. The staff also follows and comments the Helsinki reviews and questions in the Helsinki Forum in TripAdvisor online travel service. (Helsinki City Tourist & Convention Bureau 2012d.)

Tourist Information maintain so-called info wall, an electric Media Corner located in its premises, that informs visitors about attractions and on-going events in Helsinki and nearby towns and tips about restaurants, activities and other tourist services. With internet kiosks the visitors of the Information Office can search web-based tourist information and surf in internet freely. (Helsinki City Tourist & Convention Bureau 2012d.)

During the recent years Tourist Information has organized briefings to stakeholders who work in customer services in tourism-related businesses and give tourist information to customers. These information events introduce the latest news and updated information that customer servants in different fields can pass on to their clients. Events are usually arranged in co-operation with two or three actual stakeholders, event or marketing organizers. (Helsinki City Tourist & Convention Bureau 2012d.)

The main Tourist Information sells Helsinki Cards, HSL tickets to public transportation, stamps, guide books and maps as well as souvenirs such as shopping bags and fridge magnets, disposable raincoats and umbrellas. During special occasions and macro events even themed souvenirs are sold. In addition, Tourist Information supplies

and books tickets to guided tours by foot, boat and bus arranged by local entrepreneurs. Also tickets to temporal events by stakeholder are sold on agreement. (Helsingin kaupungin matkailu- ja kongressitoimisto 2012, 22.)

Stakeholders of the Tourist Information can purchase advertisement and information space for their services or products in the media corner, that is shown in the following photo (figure 4). For tourism-related companies it is also possible to set up a temporary promotion or sales desk in the premises of the office or the outdoor terrace. (Helsingin kaupungin matkailu- ja kongressitoimisto 2012, 22.)



Figure 4. The main Tourist Information and the Media Corner

#### **4.4.2 Helsinki Region Tourist Information**

Helsingin Matkailu operates the Helsinki Region Tourist Information at the Helsinki International Airport. Tourist Information opened in August 2009 and since then has served travelers in increasing numbers. In 2011 the office served 204 000 customers and 2012 shows growth in numbers again. The Information Office is accessible 24h and personal service is given every day from 10am to 6pm or 8pm. About 70% of the customers get personal service and the rest visit the premises before and after the personnel presence. The office is located in the Arrival Hall 2A in Terminal 2. (Salonen, S. 19.3.2012.)



The regional Tourist Information employs 4 Information Officers regularly. Helsinki city together with the cities of Espoo and Vantaa as well as Uusimaa Regional Council fund the operation of the service while the daily operations are run by Helsingin Matkailu. Support for operations is also given by the Finnish Tourist Board and Finavia. (Helsinki City Tourist & Convention Bureau 2012g.)

Since the strategic management of Helsinki Region Tourist Information is shared between the member towns and Uusimaa Regional Council the office and its stakeholders are not included in this research directly. However, the outcomes and findings of the research can be partly utilized and put into practice in the regional Tourist Information too.

#### 4.4.3 Stakeholders of communal tourist information centers

Companies create networks and relationships between groups that have an interest towards its business. These other businesses and organizations are vital to the operation of the company; they have a stake in the activities that make up the business. These stakeholders are employees, customers, financiers, suppliers and communities. (Freeman, Harrison & Wicks 2008, 3.)

Figure 5 describes the main stakeholders of communal tourist informations.

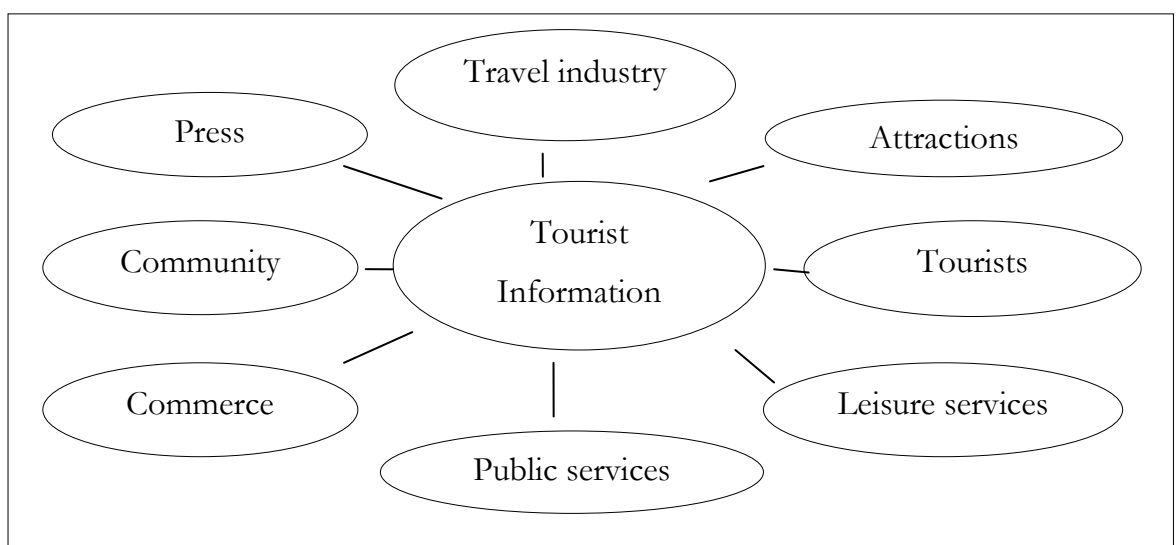


Figure 5. Stakeholders of communal Tourist Information (Freeman et al. 2008, 3; Meadows 2012)

The main stakeholders of communal tourist information centers are tourists, service providers in travel industry, public services, leisure services, tourist attractions, commerce, local community and the press. Tourists and travelers are the main customers and end-users of tourist information services. Most of the other stakeholders can be seen as suppliers and some also as financiers. (Meadows 2012.)

The travel industry services consist of incoming agents and travel agencies, tour and sightseeing operators, tourist guides and hotels as well as meeting and convention officials. It can be argued whether the transportation and taxi companies are part of travel industry but they are counted in here since these services are vital for any tourism. Also Tourist Informations in other towns and independent, non-municipal tourist information entrepreneurs are travel industry stakeholders. (Franco & Estevao 2012.)

Public services can include information services provided in the public areas such as in libraries, city halls, ports, bus terminals and airports. On the other hand information services are often run by a private company and should therefore be counted as a commerce. Public transport is an important part of public services including professions like drivers and conductors as well as traffic coordinators and planners. The decisions made by the city officials have a great impact in the communal tourist information operations. (Franco & Estevao 2012; Meadows 2012.)

Event organizers can have a stake in tourist information in the fields of leisure, commerce or public service. Press, tv, news, radio, magazines and especially the local newspapers have an interest in the tourist information as they want to report about tourism affairs and also use the information offices as a source of inspiration and information for articles and reportages. (Wang 2011, 15.)

Leisure services include businesses such as leisure activity centres and entrepreneurs, nature and outdoor entrepreneurs, cinemas, restaurants, cafés and night clubs. Commerce stakeholders are e.g. shops and boutiques, shopping centres and information services in the shopping centres. Both leisure and commercial services are



usually services that are directed for locals but the tourism provides a good share of the income and cash flow for the entrepreneurs. (Franco & Estevao 2012; Medeiros de Araujo & Bramwell 2000, 283.)

Communities are stakeholders in tourism and tourist informations as local people can be active users of the information services. Tourist informations also provide jobs and can often be an important employer during the high season. The co-operation between tourist information and local educational institutes are often vital for both parties. (Franco & Estevao 2012; Roberts & Simpson 2000, 236-237.)

Tourist attractions such as sights, amusement parks and museums are depended on the steady tourism flows. Tourists are often their main user group keeping the business live. For tourist information staff it is crucial to be familiar with the supply of these services and the two-way communication is needed between the tourist information and attractions. (Franco & Estevao 2012.)

In this research the studied stakeholders are limited to cover only the primary travel industry or, in other words, travel professionals who have business interest in the services of Helsinki City Tourist Information and other organizations operating in tourism related industries. Tourists, the end-users, are left out because the Tourist Information collects customer feedback regularly. The survey can be used as a tool to study the needs and expectations of tourists if so needed in the future.

#### **4.5 Independent Tourist Information services**

Summer 2012 introduced a new phenomenon in Helsinki as two non-municipal and privately run tourist information services were put up for the summer season.

Alternative Tourist Info was a project by local activists and Nopsa Travels travel service aimed to make tourists and locals alike travel locally and responsible within the Helsinki region. During 1,5 months the Alternative Tourist Info was located in the Kiseleff House on the Unioninkatu street where Information Officers provided tips of the day emphasizing the local and personal perspective. In August they also presented

free walking tours led by regular citizens who used their own expertise within their own field of interest. (Nopsa Travels 2012.)

Helsinki Traveller Info is a project by Haaga-Helia tourism students. It operated on the Unioninkatu street next to the Helsinki City Tourist Information main office during summer 2012 giving tourist information and selling boat tickets to Tallinn and Stockholm as well as Pub Crawl -tours and renting outdoor games. They also organized free walking tours around Helsinki regularly during the summer season. Just like Alternative Tourist Information, the Helsinki Traveller Info wanted to give tourist the possibility to meet locals in a cozy and relaxed atmosphere specializing their service for young travelers and backpackers. It is still unclear whether the service will be run in the summer 2013. (Helsingin kaupunkin matkailu- ja kongressitoimisto 13.6.2012.)

## 5 Research methods

At simplest a research can be classified as a quantitative or qualitative study. The quantitative research is most often seen as a numerical study when the qualitative research seek for meanings and consequences. A study can represent exclusively one method or combine aspects of both methods. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2009, 136-137.) This thesis is purely a qualitative study.

In this chapter a look on research methods and the implementation of the research is taken.

### 5.1 Research paradigms

Paradigms, or philosophies, describe the scientific practices that base on people's philosophies and assumptions about the world and the nature of knowledge. Paradigms offer a framework comprising an accepted set of theories, methods and ways of defining data but researcher's basic beliefs about the world will be reflected to designation of the research, data collection and analysis. Therefore the researcher should recognize and understand his or her personal paradigm as it will direct the research work along the way. (Collis & Hussey 2003, 46-47.)

The choice of paradigm should be made in early stage of the research process. The adopted paradigm can be partly determined by the nature of the research problem that is investigated. Qualitative research is usually based on the phenomenological hermeneutic paradigm while positivistic paradigm base on the quantitative approach. Qualitative research cannot bring precise answers but rather gives perceptions of social and human activities. (Collis & Hussey 2003, 13, 46-47, 52, 76.)

The qualitative approach was natural in this specific research as the research problem does not aim to prove hypothetic procedures but seek new ways of doing things. Quantitative data collection in this case would have presented too much presumptions and expectations and would not have left enough room for new ideas from respondents. Thus this research is influenced by hermeneutical thinking which allows the re-

searcher to interpret the data subjectively when studied e.g. social phenomena and thinking (University of Jyväskylä 2012).

## **5.2 Conducting research**

A qualitative research aim to describe real word and the studied object as comprehensive as possible. Instead of answering a specific question or testing a hypothesis, the collected data is rich in description of people, places, and conversations and cannot be easily presented in a statistical form. The researcher is concerned with understanding the behavior from the subject's own frame of references and cannot therefore avoid the influence of his or her own values when examining and interpreting the studied phenomenon. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 161; Siegle 2002.)

The qualitative research method is typically used when studying the human behavior. Subjects of the study, the people, are selected purposively because who they are and what they know rather than by chance. Where the quantitative research determine the size of the sample in the beginning of the study, in the qualitative research the sample size, e.g. the number of interviewees, can be determined along the data collection until the point of data saturation. Data saturation emerge when the data collection no longer generate new information for the researcher. In qualitative research the data is analyzed throughout the study. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 164, 182; Siegle 2002.)

### **5.2.1 Data collection in qualitative research**

The empirical research problem and the data collection method go hand by hand. Choosing the data collection method is usually depended on what kind of information the study aims to find and from where the data is collected (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 184). Data can be collected deductively which means that the theory and hypotheses of the research create the basis for the data collection. This is seen as a positivistic way of doing research. Inductively collected data is collected without any literature studies to gain new understanding of the studied phenomena in order to create new theories. This requires extensive knowledge about existing theories. (University of London 2012, 6-7.) The data can also be collected abductively which means that the theory influences

the research but the theory can be modified during the data collection (Virtuaali Ammattikorkeakoulu 2012).

Qualitative research has several data collection methods. Typically the data can be collected e.g. with following methods and sources (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 212; Silverman 2005, 149-167):

- Interviews face-to-face, by phone and with internet-based virtual applications
- Observation and field notes
- Written material like reports, articles, diaries and transcripts
- Visual data like videos, images, photos and commercials

### **5.2.2 Collecting data with interview**

An interview as a data collection method can be structured when there is a questionnaire or survey with specific, standard questions that are handled in same order during every interview (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 208; Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2012a).

In semi-structured interview the progress of the interview is less formal but usually all the interviewees answer the same questions. In practice semi-structured interviews are often referred as themed interviews, especially when the precise questions around certain themes are asked but the interviewees might answer slightly different questions. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2012a.) Theme interviews give interviewer and interviewee a possibility for more open discussion and the researcher should carefully choose the interviewees who are deemed to know the subject in questions well and can provide useful information among the subject (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2012b).

Unstructured or open interviews are typically situations where the interviewer and interviewee discuss a certain theme freely and the interview is run along the terms of interviewee. The interviewer examines the opinions, thoughts, feelings and views of the respondent. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 209-210; Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2012c.)

An interview can be conducted as an individual, pair or group interview. In scientific research, Hirsjärvi, Remes and Sajavaara (2009, 210) presume the most common being the individual interview. Group and pair interviews are efficient when the individual interview situation can be assumed to be unnatural, stressing or even intimidating for the interviewee. In group interviews the flow of speech is usually more natural and respondents can help each others to remember things that in individual interviews might not come up. Group interviews are reasonable when studied e.g. children or group cultures. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 210-211.)

Interviews are often conducted in face-to-face situations and recorded with a dictaphone or a camcorder. Recording helps interviewer to concentrate and better run the interview situation when no note-taking is needed and the transcription from the tape is more intensive. Interviews can also be run e.g. by postal questionnaires, telephone or skype, e-mail, messenger or in chat rooms and other virtual spaces. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 211-212; Wilson & Sapsford 2006, 94.)

### **5.3 Validity and reliability**

In empirical research the credibility of the research results need to be discussed. Credibility can be assessed by measuring the reliability and validity of the study. Validity of the results endorse that the study actually measures those factors that are relevant to the study and the results are not produced by the researcher during the research process. Errors such as poor samples, insufficient research conduction and misleading measurement weaken the validity of research. (Collis & Hussey 2003, 58-59; Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 231-233; Sapsford & Jupp 2006, 23.) One measure of validity is the reliability of the study. Reliability can be tested by repeating the research process: if the replication brings same results in separate but similar occasion, the results are reliable. Under phenomenological paradigm, qualitative research, the criterion of reliability is usually not as highly assessed as in quantitative study. Phenomenologists ensure reliability of the study by following a number of procedures aiming to authenticity. (Collis & Hussey 2003, 58; Foster 2006, 86.) Reliability in qualitative research can be improved e.g. by explaining in detail how the research and interviews were conducted and ana-

lyzed (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 232). The research process of this thesis is described in the chapters 5.4. and 5.5.

In this study the number of interviews was not set at the beginning of the research but interviews were run until the saturation point (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 164, 182; Siegle 2002) was reached in order to improve the validity of the research. The interview questions were based on the theory of the study and although asked more informal and personified way during each interview the subject around the specific question was always identical in interviews.

A successful semi-structured or theme interview is always a unique situation which on its best resemble a discussion between the interviewer and respondent. Therefore the interview situation is very difficult to repeat at different occasion and by another researcher. In order to better examine the reliability of the study the following chapter will explain thoroughly how the interviews were conducted. The data analysing method in this study based abductively on grounded theory which also lead to the fact that the subjectivity of the researcher can be argued or even questioned.

#### **5.4 Conducting the research**

Interviewing was selected as a data collection method in this thesis as it was believed to be the best way to examine the views and opinions of the stakeholders without giving presumptions for the results in advance. Mixing the principles of both theme interview and semi-structured interview seemed to provide most flexible and customized practice to conduct the interviews since the stakeholders of Tourism Information Offices typically present actors in many different sectors in the field of tourism with different expectations and needs for tourist information services.

The interviewees were selected carefully among the stakeholders from different sectors. The organizations which they present have an interest and close co-operation on their daily operations with Helsinki City Tourist Information main office at the street Pohjoisesplanadi. This is to say the chosen organizations already co-operate closely with Tourist & Convention Bureau or have stressed a strong will to develop new ways

for co-operation with the office in the near future. Also the criteria that the organizations direct their services for regular tourists, their employees meet face-to-face with visitors and they give information about Helsinki was emphasized when choosing the respondents to the study.

All together eight interviews with nine respondents were conducted during September 2012. One interview was a pair interview since the representatives of the specific organization work closely together as a team and both team members were wanted to respond and share their views. The interviewees presented following stakeholders:

- Cruise tour operator
- Hotel reception
- Yearly mass event organizer
- Independent Tourist Information
- Visitor attraction
- Sightseeing operator and tour producer (three representatives)

To ensure the anonymity of the respondents, the interviews are coded in the following table (table 1.) without mentioning the organization or company they represent. The table also gives the dates and length of each interview.

Table 1. Interview coding

	Organization	Date	Length, min
R1	Tour Operator	4.9.2012	39.18
R2	Tour Operator	4.9.2012	33.26
R3	Event Organizer	6.9.2012	16.24
R4	Tour Operator	10.9.2012	30.15
R5	Independent Tourist Info	17.9.2012	46.39
R6	Hotel Reception	20.9.2012	25.40
R7	Visitor Attraction	24.9.2012	23.21
R8	Cruise Tour Operator	26.9.2012	45.12



Two sets of questions were created, one for the representatives of non-public Tourist Information and the other for the rest of the respondents. The question sets are enclosed to this thesis as attachments (attachments 1 and 2). Both sets have two equal questions. The rest of the questions in each set asked respondents to describe their services and expectations for the tourist information services, but in each set the formulation and diction of the questions were targeted to the stakeholder's industry. The set of questions were sent to interviewees in advance by e-mail. At the beginning of each interview the reason for the interview, the research problem and researcher's position in the Tourist & Convention Bureau were explained thoroughly. During each interview the questions in the set were asked more or less in the same order but in more informal, personified and describing form than presented originally in the paper. More precise and detailed questions were asked by interviewer according to each respondents answers to get more information about the matter in question and to keep the conversation live and rich.

One interview was carried out in English on preference of the interviewee, others in Finnish. The language choice in each case was natural either because it was interviewees' mother tongue or the major communication language in his or her work. All the interviews were recorded by dictaphone and transcribed into text form for closer analysis. The voices of thinking, filler words and laughing were left in the text because they provide valueable hints of respondents reactions and views for the interview interpreter as well.

The shortest interview was conducted with an organization that does not operate primarily in tourism industry but recently begun the joint marketing activities with Tourist & Convention Bureau. The organization do not have much experience on co-operation with Tourist Office but has a strong will to develop the affair with it in the near future. The length of the interview was 16.24 minutes but all the questions in the set where responded during it. The longest interview took 46.39 minutes when the average length of the interviews were about 30 minutes.

## 5.5 Analysing the data

In qualitative research the analysis of data can often begin simultaneously with data collection. Starting the analysis in early stage help the researcher to find out when the saturation point is reached. In a qualitative study it might be difficult to make separation between the stages of data collection and analysis since the data collection method can also be the basis of the analysis. Principally, the chosen analyzing method should be the one that best brings the answer to the research problem. (Collis & Hussey 2003, 252-253; Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 221-223.)

For qualitative data analysis there is not one clear and exclusive practice but several different approaches. One way is to quantify data but if that is not possible then researcher must find a non-quantifying method. (Collis & Hussey 2003, 252-253.)

The data analysis of this research was influenced by the grounded theory methodology. In the grounded theory the collected data typically aims to find out the basis of the studied phenomenon and create new theories as in inductive inference. Although grounded theory method is best applied to the study with no preconceived theoretical framework in some cases inference can also be abductive. In the abductive analysis the researcher and his or her cognition stands in the determinative role and the analysis is influenced by theoretical instruments and hints. When analyzing data by grounded theory method one needs to accept the fact that results are always combined to the context and subjectivity occurs. (Saaranen-Kauppinen and Puusniekka 2012d.)

The data of this thesis was collected deductively as the interviews based on the theoretical framework of the study. However, the data analysis was influenced by the grounded theory and the abductive inference of it and the coding and interview analysis were influenced by the researcher's views; During the transcription of the interviews certain subjects and topics seemed to emerge in most or all interviews. It was logical to select these subjects to be the subcategories and then collect more detailed information and suggestions under each category. In grounded theory this is called coding (Collis & Hussey 2003, 272). Some suggestions appeared frequently in the answers of interviewees and was picked to the categories due to the repetition but a few suggestions were

picked due to the excellence of the distinctive idea. The conclusions about the future needs of Tourist Information stakeholders and the travel patterns of Helsinki visitors are therefore subjective but base on the theoretical framework of this thesis.

## **6 Stakeholders' expectations on the Tourist Information Center**

All companies that were selected to participate in the study have co-operation with Helsinki City Tourist & Convention Bureau. The sizes of organizations which the interviewees represent range from small family businesses to middle-size national and large multinational companies. The interviewees work as managers, middle management and service personnel. In their work they all meet Helsinki visitors regularly and face situations where they need to counsel Helsinki visitors who want to learn more about the destination.

In the beginning of the interviews the respondents were told not to think too much about how the Tourist Information serves nowadays but merely come with suggestions and ideas steaming from respondent's company's needs and dreams in the future. In general, the presented suggestions and ideas are very realistic and do not require significant changes in the daily operations or resources of Tourist Information. Most ideas are do-able if the Tourist Office has the will to start developing and implementing them. The need for only small changes can be seen as a result too: the way the things are done now are correct and by implementing the new ideas and suggested roles the services of Tourist Information can be improved to be essential for both businesses in tourism field and Helsinki visitors.

This chapter presents the main results of how Helsinki City Tourist Information can help its stakeholder to better reach and serve their customers and what services the stakeholders wish to be offered in the near future.

### **6.1 Co-operation is the key**

Helsinki City Tourist & Convention Bureau's operations are divided into teams which inseparably implement marketing and communication activities in their daily work. During the research process it became clear that when describing their expectation for the future tasks of Tourist Information services the respondents did not actually differentiate whether the tasks should be carried out by marketing, communication or information team, but saw the service of Tourist & Convention Bureau as an entity.

This signals the importance of internal co-operation between the teams in the office and that in the future the roles and tasks of Information Officers will be more diversified too.

As an example of functional outer co-operation the interviewees presenting tour operators, R1, R2, R4 and R8, all mentioned their co-operation with Helsinki Cruise Network and their satisfaction with its operation and the Cruise Coordinator of Tourist Office.

This year it (the Cruise Network) has been very active and very useful with all the information about the boats, when they come or don't and so on, so it's been a huge benefit for us ( R2, 4.9.2012).

During the interviews it also became clear that entrepreneurs seek for more intense co-operation not only with Tourist & Convention Bureau but with other operators in the field and even beyond it. A few interviewees emphasized how important it is to bundle travel services into innovative packages and saw the role of Tourist & Convention Bureau as an initiator, marketer and supplier of these packages:

We wish that tourists, both domestic and international visitors would find our webshop as a presale point and it would be just great to expand it so that different operators in Helsinki would co-operate in bundling services so that we have the hotel and entrance tickets and all that in a package that can be bought from one place. -- Different channels would supply the package but they all have the interest to sell it in advance. (R7, 24.9.2012.)

## **6.2 Travel trends define the activities**

How did the interviewees see the future role of Tourist Information in Pohjoisesplanadi? Interpreting the interviews in general it does not seem that big changes are necessary in the near future. The respondents expect more intensive co-operation and that the trends and phenomena effecting tourism all around the world will be better recognized in Tourist Office and its tourist information. Locality, 'live like locals' - concept, responsibility and maritime activities were seen as important pull-

factors in following the years and that tourist marketing and information should strongly promote services with these aspects. The interviewee R1 (4.9.2012) pointed this out with the following comment:

We have lot of green areas by the shore and there visitors can see how people in Helsinki really live. We have history by the shore and the archipelago nature so we should be proud of it. We should proudly push them (tourists) there to see how wonderful this city is, and interesting in particular. The view from the sea towards the city is like a new dimension to this town.

Several interviewees pointed out that Helsinki is a relatively small city and easy and safe for tourist to experience. Helsinki is not a major tourist destination with must-see attractions known by everyone around the world. Instead, it has and will remain as an exciting, new destination. Therefore there will always be demand for face-to-face tourist information services even though the number of customers in the Information Offices would decrease during the following years. The respondent R1 (4.9.2012) described how tourists experience Helsinki:

They know St. Petersburg and Copenhagen and have heard about Stockholm and they have lot of expectation for these cities. But Helsinki is a mysterious, mystical place where they come with no expectation but leave very satisfied, positively surprised.

The participants of the interviews described themselves as typical travelers of today. They book flights and accommodation and find information about their travel destination mostly on the internet. When searching for information they do not look for official tourist organization websites but check it if it is high on Google search results. In the destination they usually take a city map and brochure and might pop into local Tourist Information if they have some specific questions or ask in the hotel reception. Few respondents had used mobile maps or guides but many mentioned that they love to read a guide book too:

When we were in Amsterdam for three days visiting different spots we used the mobile map all the time for the addresses and it served well. But usually I buy a small guide book as well because it is nice to read it and have it in your bag. (R3, 6.9.2012.)

### 6.3 Future roles of tourist information

The expectations and thoughts about the future roles and responsibilities of Tourist Information by interviewed stakeholders can roughly be divided into five categories. The following figure (figure 6) presents these categories and following pages will provide more close insight into the suggestions and ideas.

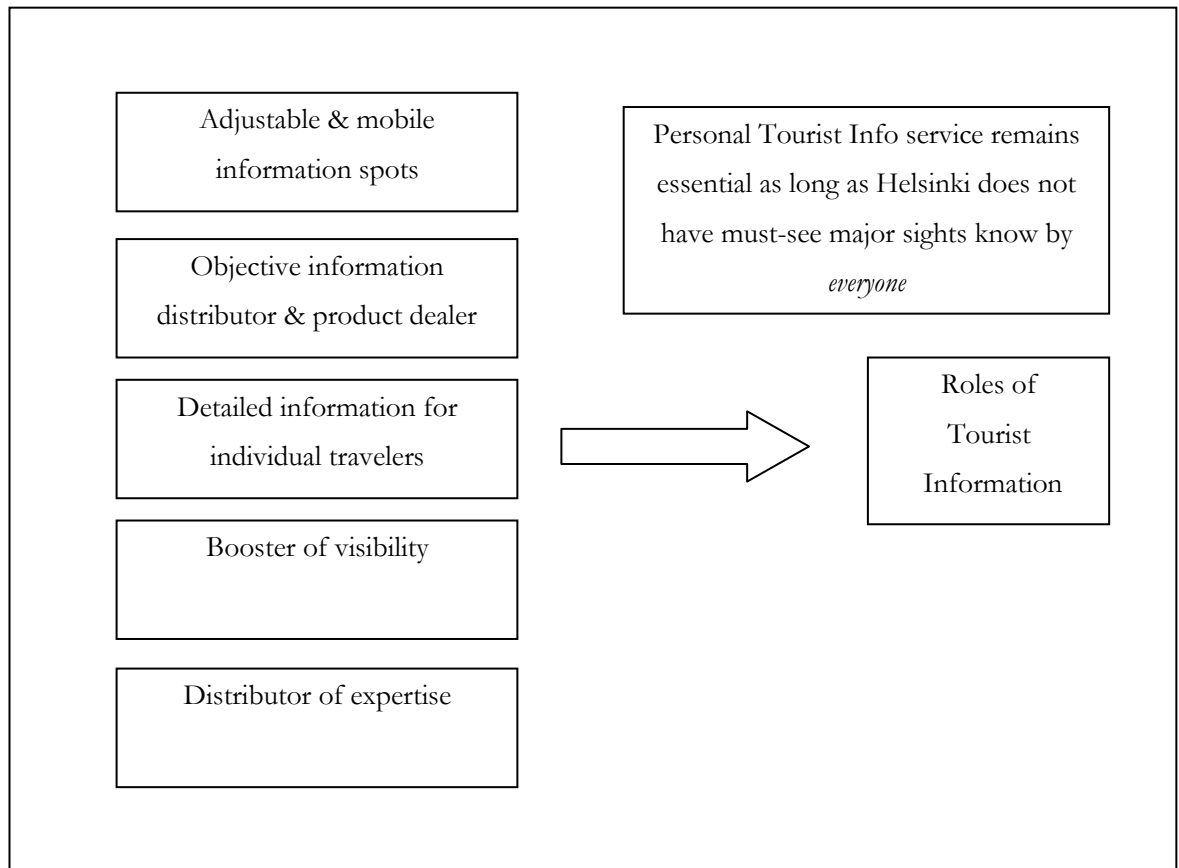


Figure 6. The roles of Tourist Information in near the future

#### 6.3.1 Adjustable and mobile information spots

Most interviewees of the study emphasized the importance of availability of Tourist Information in the spots where tourists tend to gather. Helsinki Helper service is highly appreciated by the respondents. Respondent R2 (4.9.2012) mentioned that the service is very handy and effective way to reach the tourist flows where and when needed:

With Helpers you get the info nifty in the right place when needed. -- They are in the terminals when the boats arrive and we are there selling our sightseeing tickets so we

benefit a lot of it when they can respond to the tourists questions that our sales clerks can't.

A few respondents mentioned that they wish the Helpers' patrolling area could be wider and spread even outside the city centre to certain popular events and tourist spots such as Linnanmäki amusement park and more regularly to the cruise piers and terminals all over the town. The potential of the movable Info Container was also mentioned and a few respondents suggested similar or smaller stalls to be brought to the spots where the number of tourists is temporarily high due to an interesting event or other occasion. Also year-round service was proposed.

The representatives of the independent Tourist Information also mentioned the importance of the locations. Their office suffered from lack of visitors during the summer 2012 and the representatives believed it had something to do with the fact that their office was too close to the official Tourist Information in Pohjoisesplanadi. They also believed that they were not close enough to the paths where the visitors in their target group mostly move in the city.

The location of the main Tourist Information on Pohjoisesplanadi was seen as an ideal among all the representatives who operate sightseeing tours:

We have the first stop at the Senate Square and on the Market Square. The Tourist Information is right next to us, plus the (Info) Container by the Manta statue, and it is very good to have them there. (R4, 10.9.2012.)

The sightseeing officers help tourist with short and simple questions at the departure points and harbors. However, all the sightseeing operators mentioned that they highly appreciate and utilize the possibility for sightseeing officers to send inquirers with more specific and difficult questions to the Information spot around the corner for more accurate information and written material on their own language.

The interviewees did not believe that the mobile applications will replace maps and tourist brochures in the near future but their importance will grow. By this time none



of them had faced a demand for such services either for Helsinki information or their own service from clients. Three respondents had used mobile tourist applications themselves recently when travelling abroad and had the strongest believe in the popularity and demand of such services in the coming years. They saw the possibilities and advantages of the QR-coding and mobile applications for tourist information purposes more clearly than those respondents who had not used mobile guidance and considered them as an efficient way for information distribution for target groups. The interviewee R1 mentioned that mobile walking guides could provide enterprises along the route a new way to attract clients when in the route description it were told what services there are available along the route on that specific spot. R2 suggested that if Tourist & Convention Bureau would launch their own mobile site it could base on the bureau's official website which she finds very helpful. The interviewees R6 and R8 said they believe that in the future there is a huge demand for applications that tell what services there are in the near vicinity of the spot where the visitor currently is. R8 emphasized that this service could persuade cruise visitors docking in Hernesaari pier to go and visit the nearby local services instead of stay onboard because they do not know what possibilities there are available close to the pier.

Five interviewees doubted if Helsinki will have sufficient supply for free Wi-Fi connection to make the mobile applications a significant mode of guidance within few years. The critics also pointed out that Helsinki visitors such as one-day cruise passengers are often elderly people who do not possess a smartphone nor know how to use one. The respondent R4 highlighted the importance of traditional information boards and direction signs around the city centre and wished the city would produce and concentrate more on these and not see mobile guidance as a replacement.

There could be lot more info boards close to the big hotels, certain central spots like Railway Station, Forum, Kamppi, Esplanade... --. With clear maps and the most important services listed on them. (R4, 10.9.2012.)

### 6.3.2 Objective information distributor and product dealer

All the respondents agreed that it is very important to have a Tourist Office in the city that supplies tours of local sightseeing entrepreneurs and tickets to attractions and events. Those respondents who have their own tour or event production see the office as a crucial sales channel for their service. The hotel reception employee whose job partially include advising tourists mentioned that they often send hotel guest to Tourist Office to buy tickets e.g. to sightseeing tours and cruises.

The importance of the neutrality of the information service is emphasized by most respondents. Two representatives whose company only sell their own production expressed an interest to have their own sales point in the premises of Tourist Information for certain period during the high season. The event organizer, R3 (6.9.2012), suggested that Tourist Information should have a separate event ticket sales in its premises as well:

What I wish most for Tourist Information is that it would accommodate the Lippupalvelu and Lippupiste ticket sales. -- Like Lippu-Rex in Lasipalatsi, it has just one counter that sells tickets for both Lippupiste and Lippupalvelu so it doesn't have to be a huge space.

Those enterprises which supply products of a third party do not wish that Tourist Information would acquire a travel agency license to sell package tours and compete this way with them but expect the Tourist Office to steer the buyers to their companies like before.

Four of the enterprises selling their own products brought up the topic online shopping. All had recognized its importance and have their own online shopping service. However, the Tourist Office was seen as an important marketer of those online services, especially in decision-making phase when the potential Helsinki visitor search for information on activities and services in Helsinki before booking the trip. A comprehensive selection of online tourist services should be presented in the official tourist website as this was seen as a pull factor and competitive advantage for the destination.

The respondent R1 (4.9.2012) even pointed out that a potential online shopper might find the private online shops more reliable when they are recommended by the official tourist administrator. He also suggested that the Tourist Office should set up an online booking and selling service of their own supplying third party products and tickets:

The suspicious tourist in his own sofa at home wonders if he can buy the product via that specific web shop and when the supplier is an official tourist authority the tourist of course trusts it more than when buying directly from a website of an unknown private company. --. (This way) we would also have more versatile service supply there in internet where we compete with other destinations. When Helsinki has an interesting supply of tourist products available in internet then maybe it affects on the (potential tourist's) travel decision.

Most respondents agreed that it is important to have the visitors buying the product in advance and not leave the purchase for the last minute and that the Tourist Office should act as a messenger and pusher of advance purchases.

### **6.3.3 Detailed information for individual traveler**

The respondents found the variety of written and online material in several language available on Tourist Information very useful for the tourists and believed that the versatile language skills of tourist information employees creates a positive and welcoming image for the city.

Four interviewees mentioned that it is important that tourists can get information on their own language in the Tourist Information or with Helsinki Helpers. The independent Tourist Information representatives described a few situations where they did not have common language with their customers but managed to help them with the combination of gestures and a few languages. They, however, believed that in the future their employees do not necessarily need a vast language skills since the travelers in their focus group most often speak English and the walking tours they organize must be held in English as it is the most widely spoken language among their tour participants. The hotel reception officer, R6, spoke several languages herself so she rarely have a situation where she is not able to help her customers due to the language barri-

er. She did mention that in case they do not have a common language with the customer she usually does not send the customer to the Tourist Information where help in his or her own language there might be available since the customer would not understand the directions or the purpose of the visit anyhow.

The cruise coordinator R8 mentioned that especially cruise passengers are still mainly elderly people, even after a couple of years, with limited ability to speak foreign languages. For them it is important to have service on their own language, not only because they feel more comfortable with that but also because they feel safer to go and experience the city on their own and spend more money on local services when they know they can cope with their mother tongue.

The need for Russian speakers in the field was recognized among interviewees. They find it very important that Russian-speaking tourists can get service on their language at least in Tourist Information and that the tourist information in Russian is available on the Tourist Office's website and on written form as most of the stakeholder organizations only have a very limited supply of service and material in Russian.

Besides focusing on language skills, more specific tourist information should be allocated to the individual needs of the visitors. As the phenomenon behind the independent Tourist Informations indicates, tourists seek for local, tailored experiences and want to have a feeling of individuality even when traveling on a package tour. The hotel receptionist R6, cruise coordinator R8 and event organizer R3 pointed out that people who are visiting the city on business, like conference participants, performing artists and cruise crew, are also potential tourists but often lack the personalized suggestions on what to do in Helsinki on their short break from work. The Cruise coordinator expressed it this way (R8, 26.9.2012):

Once you're off the ship you are a tourist.

The business guests might have only a couple of hours free in the evening or between meetings in Helsinki and cannot find information on what to see and do precisely there

and then. The respondents R6, R8 and R3 suggested that Tourist Information should target more precise information services for this visitors group in the future.

R8 (26.9.2012) also told that he had already noted the demand for responsible tours and activities among regular cruise tourists and that he believed the demand will grow in near future as visitors look for experiences that come with good conscience:

Like I was telling the nature is a big thing, environment is a big thing, organic, culinary... Wine tastings, caring for environment, cleaning a bit... At the end of the day everyone wants to have a good time and remember how wonderful was the experience in that place.

At the moment responsible tours in Helsinki are mostly availability for groups by advance booking but the demand of individuals visitors will grow too. The respondent emphasized that in Helsinki the responsibility of e.g. public services and local products is high but more efficient marketing is needed to make visitors aware of the possibilities and the services available. He also suggested that Tourist Office should steer a project with responsible service providers aiming to create travel packages e.g. for physically or visibly challenged visitors. Tourist information should have a central role in marketing and informing the services for tourists before and during their visit.

#### **6.3.4 Booster of visibility**

All the interviewees believe that in the future it is important to boost the visibility of Helsinki tourist services in virtual word. Most researched organizations are present in social media, e.g. in Facebook, but the number of fans or followers is modest with most. The independent Tourist Information had tested marketing their services with Foursquare and Facebook banners but did not find the results encouraging for Helsinki City Tourist Information to start marketing with these tools at this point.

When asked what social media channels, applications or tools Tourist Information should use in the near future to boost the image of Helsinki as a tourist destination and the visibility of the stakeholder organization in question basically just one respondent,

R8 (26.9.2012), came with new ideas and suggestion. He suggested that Tourist Office would invest in an interactive information service system where visitor with questions could contact a virtual Information Officer by touchscreen device somewhere in the city, near an important sight or tourist attraction, or by his or her own smartphone or tabloid. He also told about a hotel booking service that he had seen in Copenhagen: the application was available at the Tourist Information premises for anyone to use. The software hold updated information about availability of hotels, prices and other vital information for the booking. The user was able to book and pay the preferred hotel with the application or go directly to the hotel and pay for the accommodation at the location.

All interviewees had used local tourist information service or participated on guided tours by bus, boat, foot or with the help of mobile application during their recent trips abroad. None of them, except the R8, had run into new and innovative tourist services abroad and told that as far as they know the services offered by the tourist informations are pretty similar all around in Europe:

We have similar activities here when I compare with other cities. No big differences. --  
We're on right track here. (R4, 10.9.2012.)

Instead, the interviewees came up with more traditional suggestions on how to boost the visibility of their service or events in the Tourist Information Office. Few respondents mentioned how important it is for the Information Officers to know the products to be able to inform and recommend them to tourists. R6 (20.9.2012) stated:

I think it is very good to familiarize yourself with the products because that way it is lot more easier to tell about it (for the clients).

Most respondents believed that the brochures will still play an important role in tourist information activities during the next couple of years and wanted the Tourist Informations to distribute their brochures. The organizations giving tourist information themselves are willing to distribute Helsinki tourist material for their customers as well. The event organizer, (R3 6.9.2012), also mentioned that they would be willing

to decorate the Tourist Information with their visual image, logos, window stickers and other props during their event to stimulate the tourists to buy tickets and participate in the event:

We would need to be in the blood circulation of the city: When a tourist steps inside the Tourist Information he or she right away wonders what's going on, what's this event.

Four representatives wished that Information Officers would actively encourage visitors to use their available travel services during the low-season. All mentioned that they have certain services and activities that are worth experiencing despite e.g. bad weather. Few representatives also expressed an interest to co-operate with Tourist Information by giving special offers for clients who during low-season buy their tickets from the Tourist Information. The interviewees agreed that information activities during the low-season should be targeted to image advertising in internet and virtual channels to make people want to travel to Helsinki. During the high-season in summer the focus should be on face-to-face marketing and giving information about actual services and happenings.

### **6.3.5 Distributor of expertise**

During the interviews it was confirmed that tourists ask tourist information from anybody who work among them without making a difference whether the answerer represents an official city tourist information or a private company:

Our employees are similarly tourist counselors the way they need to study every possible little detail about Helsinki because anything will be asked from them (R4, 10.9.2012).

All the interviewees agree that their frontline employees must be able to help tourists with their questions. The employees who face tourist with questions daily need to know very thoroughly e.g. what services there are for tourists available in the near vicinity of that specific operation spot. Usually the questions asked by tourists are simple and short and employees need to be able to answer them right away by heart.

The organizations whose main activity is to sell their own products often guide tourists with more specific questions to the Tourist Information center. Those whose job description include tourist counseling (R5 & R6) or whose outlet is relatively far from the Tourist Information at Pohjoisesplanadi (R7) try to help customers on their own. They usually have an access to internet, too, and they find lot of helpful information there, mostly on Google but also on Tourist Office's website. Tourist with questions about travelling around in Finland are most often sent to Tourist Information by all interviewees.

According to the respondents the frontline staff in their organization very rarely face questions to which they cannot find an answer with the help of a colleague or internet. That is to say, tourists with very unusual and difficult questions seem to come directly to the Tourist Information to meet experts and do not expect anyone to be able to give them answer on that precise matter. Respondent R7 (24.9.2012) stated:

Customers do understand if we cannot find an answer. They don't expect to get everything (answers) from us.

A problem that the interviews revealed is that frontline staff and seasonal workers of the stakeholder companies do not know tourist information services well enough; they do not know thoroughly what kind of information is provided in the official tourist website, what kind of helpful material there is available in Tourist Information and they do not follow the information channels by Tourist Office regularly. That argument was confirmed by several respondents when they described a service or source of information e.g. on the website that they thought could be helpful for them in counseling situation without knowing that the information actually exist and is available already. E.g. respondent R6 mentioned that the visitors often find Helsinki as an expensive city and that Tourist Office could produce information for budget travelers but did not know that the official tourism website has several pages with tips about travelling on shoestring budget.



When asked if the enterprises would be interested in seasonal briefing for their staff provided by tourist information representative, all but one party (R5) were interested. A few respondents said they would send their staff to a public briefing by Tourist Information but others expressed an interest in a private briefing tailored along their needs in their own premises. Most common wishes for the content of the briefings was information about events during becoming season, what interesting phenomena there are in Helsinki at the moment and what new services Helsinki has for tourists. A couple of organizations even wished for training about basic tourist matters for their newcomers. One respondent, R7, saw the briefing of permanent staff as important as the seasonal staff, as she believed that if they would know about the offerings of upcoming season better they could come up with new, innovative co-operation ideas e.g. with various event organizers and service providers.

The independent Tourist Information representatives (R5) mentioned that they would like to meet Tourist & Convention Bureau's staff before starting the new season to inform the employees about their new services. They believed that they would not need seasonal briefing as such but emphasized how important it is for both parties to know what the other does. They had experienced a lack of internal communication in Tourist & Convention Bureau during summer 2012 and wanted to improve the co-operation with the office for the next season.

There were lot of misunderstanding on your side, because all your employees did not know about our free walking tours. -- We should have come up with better ways to both benefit from each other's presence. (R5, 17.9.2012.)

The interviews confirmed that the hotel reception staff and the employees in different information counters have created own listings of useful information that they need on regular basis in their work. Those organizations which use their own listings admit that those listing are not carefully updated and might contain wrong or misleading information. They thought it would be a good idea if a Tourist Information representative could check those listings during his or her briefing in the company and advise how to update the lists. It was also mentioned that the Tourist Information could produce a website where all the crucial information material, like exceptional opening hours,

changes in public transport, phone numbers and addresses for important tourist attractions and services were collected together so that people who need to check these things for their customers could easily find the information. The website could also present tips and ideas on how to better serve or inform customers on certain actual matters, e.g. what to do on Sunday evening when all the museums and shops are closed and it is raining.

Every respondent mentioned that they find it important to know the becoming events in Helsinki. They emphasized that they need to know about events well in advance to be able to plan their own operations along the effects of the event. A few organizations wanted to market the events to their own customers and inform their visitors, while some respondents wanted to develop co-operation with event organizers and tour operators need information about the effects of the events on their operation routes. The independent Tourist Information representatives wished to get a comprehensive list of interesting events well in advance so that they would be able to market events on their own information channels:

We put lot of effort on knowing what's going on and where because we had the Facebook account where we told about these. -- It would be good to get a list of main events in May so we know few weeks in advance what to promote and not only a day or so before. (R5, 17.9.2012.)

The tour operator representatives reported that they often find it difficult to get information about the exceptional arrangements e.g. street blockages and the duration of the special arrangements during big events. They all knew where to look for information but pointed out that it would be very helpful for them if all the important information were gathered under one (web)site. One respondent mentioned that they do not expect the Tourist Information to be the place to collect and sort that kind of information but other two envisaged how this sort of information would serve also other people working among tourists, e.g. hotel reception and private information staff who need to advise their customers about changes in public transport travelling times and routes.

The most important results of the study are presented once more in a table that is available as an attachment (attachment 3).

## 7 Conclusions

The globalization and new ways of utilizing technology in everyday life have brought new possibilities and challenges for tourism and travelling. The phenomena in tourism reflect the prevailing general opinions and trends as well as travelers' personal values. Travelers' needs are subjected to changes in the environment and lifestyle of humans and in recent years tourism industry has become more aware of people's needs for customized and tailored services.

People search for tourist information and book their travel services online any time which challenges the traditional roles of Destination Management Organizations and their Tourist Information Centers. Tourists' need to visit a Tourist Information Center in the destination will reduce in the future and Information Offices need to find new ways to reach and serve their customers to justify their existence. Besides the tourists, the stakeholders like sightseeing tour providers, event organizers and tourist attractions should be seen as the clients of Tourist Information Office. The services directed and tailored to stakeholders could provide new tasks and roles for Information Offices.

This thesis presented some trends and phenomena that will influence on people's travelling and their needs on tourist information services in the near future. However, one should also examine other studies that forecast the future trends influencing in tourism and traveling in order to get more hints for the continuous development process and respond to the demands by clients. For example, the Foresights by Finpro, available on the website [www.finpro.fi/foresight](http://www.finpro.fi/foresight), offer a sneak peak to the interesting future scenarios affecting travelling and tourism.

This chapter summarizes the theoretical framework and findings of this thesis and give some suggestions for the future activities of Tourist Information of the Helsinki City Tourist & Convention Bureau. The tourist information services are developed currently and with the help of this study some new ideas can be put into practice. The next step for the analysis of the development could be a study or a survey about the views

and expectations of the end-users of the service, tourists. The expectations of tourists could be studied e.g. by subscribing a thesis from a local school or university.

## **7.1 Co-operation and the supply of the products and service**

The actors in tourism industry must filter the signals indicating the changes in their business environment in order to keep up with the needs of their customers and to develop their products and services. The innovative new products attract tourists to the destinations and co-operation in the development and marketing of the products are needed between public and private actors. The service products in tourism combine various services and a service package is typically a bundled package by several service providers. Each product affects on the holistic image of the tourism destination and the tourist's expectations towards the destination. (Stickdorn 2009, 248-249.)

In this study, nine representatives of stakeholders of tourist information services in Helsinki were interviewed in order to find out what expectations they have on the services of Tourist Information in the following years. The interviews indicated the importance of co-operation between the stakeholders and Helsinki City Tourist & Convention Bureau and the internal communication and co-operation in the bureau. Where Tourist & Convention Bureau's role is to interpret the trends in tourism, market the destination and its tourist services, the Tourist Information needs to know its visitors, find out their needs and pass on the knowledge to stakeholders so they can develop their services along those needs.

In Helsinki the cruise visitors are one of the most important user groups of Tourist Information and the services provided by the companies that the interviewees represent. Helsinki Cruise Network aim to develop the services provided to cruise visitors and the Tourist & Convention Bureau's Cruise Coordinator has an active role in the network. A few interviewees mentioned that they find the work of the Cruise Network beneficial. To gain more resources, efficiency and new ideas for the cruise tourism and allow more personalized services e.g. for the cruise crew, an intense, internal co-operation between Tourist Information staff and the Cruise Coordinator is needed.

The Tourist & Convention Bureau needs also to act as an intermediary for the entrepreneurs in the tourism industry as they seek for new business partners and ideas. When new services and travel packages are developed, the office can be involved in pre-marketing of the services with boosting the visibility in internet and encouraging the potential customers to buy the product online. However, Helsinki visitors tend to buy services like sightseeing tours and tickets to attractions and concerts once they arrive in the city. Therefore the Tourist Information is a natural selling point for travel packages and services and the product range needs to be enlarged. Though, Helsinki City Tourist Information is a public service provider and do not have a licence to produce own travel services. That is why private tourist enterprises should be encouraged to rent a small ticket selling points in the premises of the Tourist Information during their operation season. Also year-round event ticket sales should be provided in the premises via a private company or organization which already has a ticket supplier status and experience in the field.

## **7.2 Personalized information for clients**

Personal sources of information, including previous experiences and word of mouth recommendations from friends and acquaintances, is considered the most reliable way to find out whether a travel destination is ideal for that specific person and will not set off unpleasant surprises (Laws 2004, 101). The independent Tourist Informations that operated in Helsinki during summer 2012 marketed their services and tips from the perspective of a local. Also Tourist Information needs to provide more personalized information for its' customers in the future.

Services for challenging customer groups, like people who travel in Helsinki for business and only have a short time to see Helsinki, possibly at an inconvenient hour, should be developed and marketed more aggressively. Alternative, personalized suggestions for these visitors should be available virtually, e.g on mobile guides, or in the Tourist Information on paper. Funny and surprising ideas could be collected e.g. by asking office's Facebook fans to give their suggestions and then list these suggestions for the use of others. That would also bring a local view to the promotion. As a sug-

gestion for written material the diverse thematic postcards produced by the office would serve as a brochure for the visitors and a Helsinki promotion material; With the themed postcard visitor finds information he or she is looking for, chooses the places where he or she wants to visit and then keeps the card as a souvenir or sends it to a friend as a greeting from Helsinki.

To be able to give more personalized recommendations for visitors, the Tourist Information staff need to know the available tourist services and products very well. The importance of sharing personal experiences rather than a "gut feeling" or an expert view will grow in the future. A certain percent of the working hours of Information Officers needs to be entitle to regular, coordinated familiarization visits and training in the companies and organizations that produce tours and tourist services in Helsinki area. Close co-operation between the stakeholder enterprises and Tourist Information team leaders is required to implement training and familiarization visits on regular basis. In addition, Tourist Information employees need to take more active role in the communication with the stakeholders.

The interviews pointed out that the multilingual services offered by the Tourist Information is highly appreciated among its stakeholders and customers. The competency of languages is one of the requirements when hiring new staff to the office. That requirement needs to be reversed and the multilingual services maintained in the future too. The importance of the language training provided by the employer should not be underestimated either.

### **7.3 Promotion campaigns**

Tourist Information is a great place for tourist service promotions. Currently the stakeholder enterprises have a possibility to rent a promotion space at the premises of the Tourist Information and a few stakeholders have utilized the possibility already. Also some big events, e.g. Ice-Hockey World Championships and Helsinki World Design Capital 2012 -related events have had extra visibility in the interior of the office.

However, diverse theme weeks generated around themes like maritime, responsible or culinary Helsinki would bring free visibility and boost the demand of the services around that theme e.g. during the low season. The theme weeks can be mobilized by the Tourist Information staff and do not necessarily need a big financial investments to put into practice. For example, a maritime theme week could be held at the beginning of the sightseeing cruise season in the spring and the office interior could be decorated with maritime items. The sightseeing cruises, offerings of archipelago and other maritime services could be promoted with brochures, recommendations by the Information Officers as well as with displays in the media corner, internet pages and on Facebook. The stakeholders with maritime services could be asked to co-operate the theme week by giving some special offers or prizes to a lottery. The theme weeks could enliven the Tourist Information and direct more users for the tourist service especially during the low season. The online activities e.g. in social media would also provide free visibility for the service providers and improve the image of Helsinki as a destination where something fun is always going on.

#### **7.4 Information services for stakeholders**

Finland is known for the flat hierarchy in service culture and the ability of customer servants to deal professionally and competently with immediate queries, problems and complaints is highly appreciated among foreign tourists. The interviewees of this thesis confirmed that their frontline staff who meet tourists face-to-face and counsel them in their tourist information questions are most often able to find answers to simple and most common questions and help their clients in many problematic situations.

However, the interviews revealed that the frontline staff are not very familiar with Tourist & Convention Bureau's services that could help them in the counseling situations. The interviews indicated that there is a great interest in seasonal briefings organized by Tourist Information. The tailored seasonal briefings in the stakeholder companies would be good platforms for two-way communication with stakeholders and Tourist Information staff and might bring new ideas for more intensive and productive co-operation.



The frontline staff in the stakeholder organizations do not know what kind of information there is available e.g. on the office's website and they do not follow the office's information channels regularly. That is why Tourist Information staff should actively inform its stakeholders about the provided services e.g. in the seasonal briefings. Tourist Information has a limited customer register with contact details of the frontline staff who meet customers e.g. at the hotel receptions. This register is mainly used to send a list of opening hours during public holidays in tourist attractions to the contacts. The register would need to be expanded and updated regularly. It could be an effective information tool and should be used to send e.g. information newsletters about the actual matters and current services of the Tourist Information for the frontline staff in the stakeholder organizations.

All the interviewees of this study emphasized their interest towards the events in Helsinki. They have various reasons for their interest but a common need is to get information about the event well before it begins. In Helsinki, an event organizer needs to request several permits from different units of the city when some special arrangements are needed before or during the event. Often the advance information about special arrangements, e.g. the street blockades and changes in public transport, is not available in one source but is scattered on several different websites. The compiled information about the effects of the event is published only on the day of the event or few days before e.g. in newspapers. For tour operators this is often too late as they wish to plan the changes in their sightseeing routes in time. Also the respondents whose job description include counseling tourists said that they would need more specific information about the events in Helsinki to be able to better inform their customers about them.

In the future the Tourist & Convention Bureau and Helsinki City Event Office will have more close co-operation thanks to the organization changes in Economic Development division. Together they should invest in resources for versatile and detailed event information tool that serves also entrepreneurs whose business will be affected by the big events in the city. The information tool should provide detailed information

about the event organizer and the effects and the length of the event for the city infrastructure. It could also provide information about the changes on public holidays for the public transport and opening hours for attractions, shops, restaurants and other services that tourists use while in Helsinki.

The interviews also pointed out that tourists with questions about travelling in Finland are often sent to the Tourist Information to get help and brochures. That is why it is very important that information and brochures about other Finnish tourist destinations and towns are available in the office. Information Officers need to be able to counsel tourists with their questions and they need regular destination training and familiarization too.

The Tourist Office needs to consider new channels for virtual communication as it will be an important way of delivering tourist information in the future. Live chats are already in use in several European Tourist Information Centers and worth considering in Helsinki too. According to the interviews the stakeholder frontline staff do not usually have a need to contact Tourist Information on tourist counseling situations so there is no need for live, professional chat rooms but the chat service can be directed to tourists and potential visitors directly.

Tourist & Convention Bureau's website for the travel professionals could provide more information for the frontline staff who need to help tourists with more specific, difficult questions. In the website there could be a list with answers to "FAQs", the most common difficult questions that the counselors face regularly. This way the frontline staff could easily check the answers without wasting time searching in several websites.

## **7.5 Virtual and live help**

The Information Officers will need to know more about marketing and communication operations and tools as the customers in the future will more often be helped in virtual world than face-to-face in the Information Office. The stakeholders of Tourist Information wish for better visibility on the internet and social media but do not often

themselves have a knowledge and resources for the activities needed to reach large followership in virtual reality. With its 6100 followers (23.10.2012) Helsinki City Tourist Information reaches a fair share of fans in Facebook. This account has plenty of potential for virtual marketing and the Information Officers should have more resources and knowledge to utilize it as an information and marketing tool.

Mobile applications will play more important role in tourist guidance in the future and more aggressive marketing for free Wi-Fi service in the city is needed. So far the Helsinki visitors who use mobile city guides usually find the most suitable applications themselves but as the use of applications expands the Information Officers should be able to tell their customers which applications provide correct information and are recommendable for the needs of that specific inquirer. Different customer groups have different requirements for mobile guides so they need to know which application would best suit them.

The interviews pointed out that the respondents see the Helsinki Helpers as a crucial service for their own and Helsinki visitors' needs. The Helper service enables a mobile tourist information where and when needed and could be widened by hiring more helpers and patrolling in the broader area. For example, the shortly published study of how tourists move in Helsinki produced by Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences can be used when planning where to spread the Helpers' information services in the future. However, it must be kept in mind that the number of sponsors of the project needs to be kept reasonable as the Helpers too need to provide neutral information and recommendations.

It is clear that in the future Helsinki City Tourist Information needs to be there where tourists look for information, whether it is in virtual reality or in real world. Derek Earl Baron, the writer of a popular travel blog "Wandering Earl", visited Finland in September 2012 and made a following comment about his trip on his blog (Wandering Earl, 2012):

Finland lacks the must-see attractions, the 'wow' activities and the life-changing high lights that we often seek out when we choose a destination to visit. -- But just because

these activities look so simple, and possibly unexciting at first glance, doesn't mean that they too cannot change one's life or at least help create a travel experience that stands out as something quite special.

As Earl and a few interviewees of this study point out Finland is a travel destination unfamiliar to many potential tourists. Even in the future Helsinki will have visitors who do not know what to do and see in the city and cannot name a single attraction or monument worth visiting. That is why Tourist Information and its various services will be crucial for the Helsinki tourism in the future too.

## **7.6 Summarizing the proposals**

In this chapter the researcher of this study presented some proposals for the practices and service improvements of the Tourist Information. The proposals are concrete suggestions rising from the ideas by the stakeholders. The following list summarizes the suggestions once more. The list proposes activities that could be implemented in the Tourist Information and the training of the staff to keep them updated with the requirements of the industry:

- Easiest way to set up the event ticket sales in the premises of Tourist Information is to outsource the service to a private company that already operates as a ticket supplier.
- The promotion material for people travelling in Helsinki for business could be collected by asking the office's Facebook fans to suggest activities and then collect the best suggestions in printed postcard that same time function as a brochure and a souvenir from Helsinki.
- Theme campaign weeks, e.g. with maritime theme, could be implemented in the office to boost the visibility of the services and activities during the low-season.
- An event data base containing information for travel professionals should be established in co-operation with the Event Office of the City. The Information Officers could participate in maintaining the data base and informing the stakeholders about the effects of the events.

- A newsletter on actual tourism phenomena and matters should be launched for the stakeholder organizations' service employees. Also the official tourism website should provide tailored information for the service staff. A stakeholder data base should be increased and updated frequently.
- Information Officers need frequent training on social media and marketing tools as well as on language skills.
- Regular familiarization of the tourism service in Helsinki and Finland should be planned together with the providers of the services. This way the Information Officers are updated with the supply and can recommend the services and products for their individual clients.

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## Attachments

### Attachment 1. Interview questions

Kerro mitä Helsingin kaupungin matkailuneuvonnan palveluita yrityksenne hyödyntää tällä hetkellä

Explain what services of Helsinki City Tourist Information does your company utilize at the moment

Kuvaile millaisia palveluita toivoisitte matkailuneuvonnan tarjoavan yrityksellenne tulevaisuudessa

Describe what kind of services you would like Helsinki City Tourist Information to offer for your company in the future

Kuvaile millaisissa tilanteissa yrityksenne työntekijät kohtaavat matkailijoita ja antavat heille Helsinki-neuvontaa

Describe situations where your employees meet tourists face-to-face and give them tourist information

Kerro millaisista palveluista yrityksellenne olisi hyötyä matkailijoiden neuvomisessa ja millaisia tietolähteitä, teknologisia välineitä tai sovelluksia toivoisit Helsingin kaupungin matkailuneuvonnan hyödyntävän lähitulevaisuudessa matkailuinfon jakamisessa

Explain what kind of services would be useful for your company when giving tourist information and what source of information, technical tools and applications you wish Helsinki City Tourist Information would use in the near future when sharing tourist information

Kuvaile millaisia matkailuneuvontapalveluita itse käytät lähtiessäsi matkalle vieraaseen kaupunkiin

Describe what kind of tourist information service you use yourself when visiting a foreign city

## Attachment 2. Interview questions for independent Tourist Information

Kuvaile niitä syitä jotka saivat teidät perustamaan oman matkailijoille suunnatun matkailupalvelun

Describe the reasons to set up your own tourist service

Kuvaile millaisia palveluita tarjositte matkailijoille. Kerro mitkä palvelut olivat suosituimpia ja mitkä kiinnostivat matkailijoita vähemmän

Describe the service that you offered for tourists. What services were popular or less popular

Kerro mitä Helsingin kaupungin matkailuneuvonnan palveluita yrityksenne hyödynsi perustamis- ja toiminta-aikana

Explain what services of Helsinki City Tourist Information did your company utilize when founding and operating your business

Kuvaile millaisia palveluita tai yhteistyömuotoja toivoisitte matkailuneuvonnan tarjoavan teille tulevaisuudessa

Describe the services you wish Helsinki City Tourist Information would offer for your company in the future

Kerro millaisista palveluista yrityksellenne olisi hyötyä matkailijoiden neuvomisessa ja millaisia tietolähteitä, teknologisia välineitä tai sovelluksia toivoisitte Helsingin kaupungin matkailuneuvonnan hyödyntävän lähitulevaisuudessa matkailuinfon jakamisessa

Explain what kind of services would be useful for your company when giving tourist information and what source of information, technical tools and applications you wish Helsinki City Tourist Information would use in the near future when sharing tourist information

Kuvaile millaisia matkailuneuvontapalveluita itse käytät lähtiessäsi matkalle vieraaseen kaupunkiin

Describe what kind of tourist information service you use yourself when visiting a foreign city



Attachment 3. The Roles of Tourist Information in the future - principal results

<b>Movable information spots</b>	<b>Objective information distributor &amp; product dealer</b>	<b>Detailed information for individual travelers</b>	<b>Booster of visibility</b>	<b>Distributor of expertise</b>
Wider Helsinki Helpers service and patrolling area	Tickets to tours, attractions and events sold in the premises	Information on several languages available	Virtual information services need to be developed	Expertise on challenging questions by visitors & Finland information
The location of main office on Pohjoisesplanadi crucial	Neutral information on services for tourist	Individual & tailored information for people visiting city on business	Information Officers need to be familiar with the available tourist services	Tailored, seasonal briefings for stakeholders
The advantages of mobile guidance not to be underestimated, broader free Wi-Fi services needed	Individual companies selling their tickets/services in the premises	Information on responsible tours & local specialties	Brochure and map distribution	Information on services for stakeholders frontline staff
	Boost of online shopping services		Visibility of events and theme weeks in the premises	Comprehensive information on events for stakeholders
			Encourage tourist to use services during low-season	